THE FREE LANCE

A Publication Of

The Free Lance Poets and Prose Workshop, Inc.

Cleveland, Ohio

Volume 1 Number 2

Helen Johnson Collins, Editor

Editorial Office: 6005 Grand Ave., Cleveland 4, Ohio

Editorial Board

Helen J. Collins, Chairman of Poetry
Casper L. Jordan, Chairman of Prose
Beatrice Augustus, Secretary
B. Helen Dobbins Dobbs, Treasurer

Manuscripts should be sent to Editorial offices, 6005 Grand Avenue, Cleveland 4, Ohio. Subscriptions should be sent to Casper L. Jordan, Chief Librarian, Carnegie Library, Wilberforce, Ohio. Postage should accompany all manuscripts which desire to be returned.

****

CONTENTS

Helen J. Collins 3
Through The Needle's Eye

Mary B. Landgrabe 8
All Of My Days – Portrait Of William Ellery Channing
Better To Be Out Of Print – Inflation
An Angel Came Running

B. Helen Dobbins Dobbs. 11
Music In The Wind

Madison Wood 12
For A Poet Dead – Sameness

James Liotta 13
Invocation

Erma D. McLemore 14
Arrested Flight

Jaf'ar A. Shahid 15
Elegy On Shah-Mard – Elegy On The Ring-Dove

Harvey LeRoy Allen 17
A.W.O.L. – My Childhood Fear – My Wife's Club Meetin'

Vera Steckler. 21
The Seed Of The Tree Of Life

Finley Nix. 25
Carpenter

Rose Davis Greene 26
It Is So Plain

Russell Atkins. 27
Lisbon

Casper LeRoy Jordan 30
Charles Wadell Chesnutt: Pioneer of the Color Line. – Book Review

THROUGH THE NEEDLE'S EYE

I

CITY SPRING IS A PASSION FLOWER

City spring is a passion flower
sprung full-blown from the solstice,
a many-scented bloom exotically real;

Seen through the eye of the needle
it is a plant kaleidoscopically
breathing sound and odor;

It is a bright red carnival exhaling
popcorn and canned music,
the loud pips of shooting galleries,
the bittersweet of candy cotton;

The Saturnalia on a vacant lot,
electric fairyland blinking
at the childlike people
with their intense children.

At night the petals droop and the
city sleeps as it rains,
washing away all sins into
the sewers, and green revival.

Morning spits out men and blue exhaust;
trucks race cars; cars vie with buses
to the terminal, warehouses, docks;
this is no dream; this is reality;

At noon the women swell forth
scattering to the marketplace;
voices, vegetables scream and clash
and scream again;

The noon whistles blast to wild crescendo;
chickens shriek before decapitation;
hawkers bawl, children cry, and
the city groans on its phallic stem;

Suddenly the passion flower crumbles –
spreads spikey fingers on the skyscrapers,
the little buildings, the houses; wraps
little people in a giant web;
the rushing businessman,
the darting housewife,
the flooding traffic,
the gaudy carnival;
the thundering medicine man, his charts,
monkey and black bottles;
the fat woman balancing
a basket on her head;
the tent evangelist and his drummer

caught in a silky maze, stopped dead;
for a cosmic second
the earth revolves a few degrees,

and it is summer.

II

THE CIPHERS

Pray for us, the ciphers
numbering infinity;

We are the uncountable "masses,"
a word tossed lightly about
by scientists, merchants, propagandists,
ballooned from lips of book-stuffed scholars;
probed at, poked at, probed, and queried,
surveyed, searched, exploited, mocked,
enumerated and pinned to a piece of paper.

We are the colored pins
on the wall charts, multiplied
into ourselves and by ourselves
We are black dots on
a city map of syphillis, and the pins
pointing overcrowding and under-living,
the dots and lines and pins
moved about at will;

Pray for us, the ciphers
numbering infinity;
forgive our one flaw —
built-in divinity.

III
ADVANCED POETS

Minutely seen as a circle of cannibals
feeding on each other's entrails,
grinning at mystic strength
from a dropped tooth or eyeball;
snatching phallic potency
from the virile testicles of
the slain hero.

IV
THE INVERTS

To each comes a straining
soul-deep search
from the subtle mirror silvered in the other;
the lost man seeks his brother
somewhere in psychic forests
where the wind is a broken heartbeat.

Follow, follow down the stoney trail,
hand in hand against the cold,
they come to a silver pool
intimately misted in half-light;
see the slender god at water's edge,
weeping at his broken image...

Again and again
the dream, the shattered image
warns the lost man seeking for his brother
somewhere in psychic forests where
the pool lies waiting
and the wind is a broken heartbeat.

V

THE LIBRARIAN

Precision cups each tiny flame of thought,
her candles held to the torch of the world's
wisdom neatly stacked from A to Z
0 to 9
Her hours tidy, classified minutiae noon
to night;
a fierce virginity burns at pilot light
size, checked by chastity, and the serene
volumes
bound in buckram, infinite only through the
needle eye of time;
Now darkness creeps through the window glass,
and it's home to clean blue china, supper
by candles
rare books, and bed with virginal covers barely
touching;
it's dreaming, and oh horrors, not of Keats,
or Schopenhauer,

but of strong hairy arms clutching tighter,
tighter,
and the libido blazing to a blue heat, higher,
higher,
ravishing molten fire to the explosion of the clock
and split egos
lying limply on the floor.

— *Helen Johnson Collins*

ALL OF MY DAYS

All of my days I'll want to love the earth,
Even the rankest wood which in her grows;
O, all things in their dying as in their birth –
The thorns and briars fully as the rose.
Blossom and creature, do not hide your flame,
Because some petals never did appear;
Hers is the mystery of why you came –
Sufficient unto me that you are here.
This is her way – to take again and give
Back in the same or yet another guise;
This is her way; so long as I may live,
I'll sing her praises – inscrutable and wise.
All of my days I'll sing a song to her,
Because one day I shall belong to her.

— *Mary B. Landgrabe*

PORTRAIT OF WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING

(At Walloomsac Inn, Old Bennington, Vt.)

"Here in this quiet house among the hills
He died at sunset" – legend without tears;
Anonymous and faded yet it fills
This room with the awe after a hundred years.
The drama of a great men's going told
In simple iambs underneath his name;
The year, the house, – both were a little old;
The mountains russet – no wonder that he came.
If it is true that each man has a place
And time for going, then this man chose aright;
Humility is hiding in his face:
I came, like any traveller, for the night.
His portrait speaks from these old parlor walls;
And people rock content; and the dew falls.

—— *Mary B. Landgrabe*

BETTER TO BE OUT OF PRINT

An author's out-of-print books
To himself may seem old story;
But to me the whold thing looks
Like the power and the glory.

—— *Mary B. Landgrabe*

INFLATION

When the all-inflated dollar
Hits you, hold your pants and holler;
Noting also that the kick
Hurts the body politic.

—— *Mary B. Landgrabe*

AN ANGEL CAME RUNNING

(For A Christmas Card)

An angel came running . . and tugging
At Mary's beautiful gown;
A little child angel came running
And did he kneel down, kneel down?

O no, the little child angel
(Like children everywhere)
Just wanted to see the new baby
And touch his downy-soft hair.

And Mary, smiling and lovely,
As glad as a mother could be –
She lowered the wee baby Jesus,
So the little child angel could see.

— *Mary B. Landgrabe*

MUSIC IN THE WIND

The wind's like a harp
Of many strings
And plays natural tunes

In the mountains
Hills and lakes
In the dell,
It sounds a trill

Through the ocean waves
The wind plays in motion
And the Kelpies
Dance in devotion.

— *B. Helen Dobbins Dobbs*

FOR A POET DEAD

Twelve architectonic sonnets
lie unfinished in state
upon the gramaphone.
Even the golden cockatoo,
suddenly aware of pink carnations
masses on mass,
readily assumes an attitude
of mocked bereavement.

— *Madison Wood*

SAMENESS

It is anachronous enough —
this snow which falls
heavily, heavily
within the black-fringed
forests;
dancing abstractions upon frozen ponds
where convention,
caught impious, stills
for a reason

— *Madison Wood*

INVOCATION

Every man is my brother.
None may divide
One from another
By the barriers of pride.

Every man is my neighbor,
No matter his station.
Together we labor
Toward a glorious nation.
Race, creed, and dissension
We put by the board,
And dwell peaceful together
In the grace of our Lord.

— *James Liotta*

ARRESTED FLIGHT

Stir not, small one,
Retain your static position of stillness, silence,
and solitude.
Keep to your sheltered nest of passive indifference;
For time will have molded petty years into dust of
centuries – ere your weak wings make a tedious flight
through life.
Before you are needlessly maimed or die a precocious
death,
remember – you are a suckling conceived of
justice,
kindness, honesty;
You have only the simple strength gained by nursing
teats
of openess, understanding and feeling.
So cling longer to the warm and friendly bosom of
seclusion--
Gain full strength for a hazardous – inevitable trip.
Ye weak, why rush unshielded into a world haunted
by ghosts of
greed and selfish egotism?
Why thrust your life into the hands of bandits –
Whose only language is duplicity;
Whose occupation is agression;
Whose chief sport is craftiness;
Whose sacred motto is shrewd bigotry?
Yes, you will become restless and fret small one.
You will squirm for room in which to flutter--
But – you must protect your life at any cost!
Your desperate hope lies in the seasoned strength
that only
age can give.
So – stir not small one--
Retain your static position of stillness, silence,
and solitude!

— *Erma D. McLemore*

ELEGY ON THE SHAH-MARD

O Abu-Sa'd (surname of the bird) homes and
courtyards have been desolated by your death.
The fates have bereaved us of you, and they
always select our best.
Our solicitude and caution avail not with them.
The time has wronged us and we cannot retaliate.
The flames of grief have ulcerated our hearts
after you.
All home folk and neighbours wept for you on the
day of your death.
After you, a pillar of their strength has fallen
for enemies – black beetles, snakes, mice and ants
have become free to invade the house and bring havoc.
As long as you lived they remained humbled and debased.
O abu Sa'd, may your grave have copious rain.
You were middle aged, docile, well-behaved, and
dignified
– When the prey fell within your reach, you were
agility personified.
And if it were not possible to catch by rushing,
you caught by waylaying and tact.
And a runner could not escape you by
Hiding or sheltering in a hole.
Everyday, you raided and attacked your enemies.
If he had to fight an adversary, he subdued
Him like the lion of the den.
He walked about with long stride,
very alert and watchful.
He was king of the birds, glorious and sublime
His color was yellowish-white.
His beak and legs were yellowish-red
His head was round, expanded.
O Abu Sa'd you were good, would you had lived longer!

— Jafar A. Shahid

ELEGY ON THE RING-DOVE

Is there anyone immune from the calamites of the time?
The day and night wear out everything new, but themselves are not worn out.
The Ring-Dove was the noblest and sincerest of friends,
And she was, for seventeen years, amongst
our noblest and most sincere companions.
Then a calamity of the time destroyed her unexpectedly.
And wrapped up in a coffin, she became the dust of
the grave.
And began to dwell in a desolate abode amidst
dense population.
The hearts are wounded by the smart blow of grief.
And the flames of sorrow are ablaze in the tormented
heart.
And the eyes are shedding unceasing tears.
The Ring-Dove was the delight of the homefolk and
the neighbour.
She was cheerful and responded to everyone
who, coming near, beckoned with the eye or finger.
She sang in the night, called to prayers at
dawn, and very cheerily cooed, Sagu-Hurr
Sagu-hurr.
Though mute, in her expression she was very eloquent.
For long, she thrilled me with the strains of Ma'bad,
Saraj and Al-Gharin
(Famous First Centruy Musicians)
Her eyes were red like ruby
Her legs were of purple color,
Her complexion was green like the dress of Paradise
Alas! It is impossible to get your substitute
or one resembling you.
Never was born a bird sportive as you.

— *Jaf'ar A. Shahid*

IN MEMORIAM

Harvey Le Roy Allen

1915 – 1952

A. W. O. L.

"Why man alive, you sho' does jive!"
The maiden sweetly said.
"That ain't no lie!" replied the guy.
"Meant evva word I said--
When I met you, right then I knew
My life was just beginnin' ".
"Oh, Bill," she said, and dropped her head,
"You'se started me t'grinnin'!"

"How can you know and be so sho'?
Perhaps you'll find another?"
"Becaus", said Bill, "You always will
Mean more to me than mother!
I want this night to hold you tight
To love you right--caress you!"
"Before you do", to Bill said Sue,
"Dere's lots I mus' confess to!

"Dese curls you see weren't born on me...
My hair's 'bout short as yours, dear.
Dis eye will pass, but dis'n's glass
An' in the night I snores, dear.
Dese teeth are tented but dey was rented—
I'd better pay dat rent, too.
Dat cork leg dare is my best spare....
(Now wonder where Bill went to?")

— *Harvey LeRoy Allen*

MY CHILDHOOD FEAR

When I was just 'bout eight years old
I lived in dread and fear,
For grown-ups seemed to eat so much
It really did appear
That time I grew to be a man
There would be no food here!

I watched the milk and pop they drank
And kept my mind upon
The fruit and steaks and hams and stuff
That folks were living on,
And figured in a little while
This food would sure be gone.

I wondered how they 'spected me
To ever live and grow
Unless they cut the 'mount they ate
A little bit or so...
But folk seemed not at all concerned
And I had so far to go!

And so I lived in constant fear
And no one ever knew..
Felt sure the stores would be sold out
In 'bout a year or two;
But mom and dad just ate and laughed
The same's they used to do!

— *Harvey Le Roy Allen*

MY WIFE'S CLUB MEETIN'

Well I swear, it's seven thirty
And I'm layin' 'round here dirty,
With those high-falutin' dames a-pilin' in!
Janie tol' me whilst I'se eatin'
That she's havin' her club meetin'
And I meant to hide my liquor and my gin!

All the gossip they come bringin'—
(Talk so fast it sounds like singin')
And for three full hours they just chew the fat!
They can tell you 'bout what's doin'
Who's been sued, and who is suin'—
And they'll sit and lorate this and lorate that!

They'll sit back like millionaires,
And put on a thousand airs...
Make you swear, by heck! they're really 'ristocratic!
But when cuddled in a huddle
Some one's dragged right through a puddle,
Then they lean back with, "You Don't Say?" so dramatic!

Well, they finally decided
That they've ate enough and lied,
As they stagger quite unsteady to their feet.
No need lookin' on a shelf
'Cause I know there's no booze lef'—
(I bet I'll fix them dames next time they meet!)

—— *Harvey LeRoy Allen*

THE SEED OF THE TREE OF LIFE

An allegory based on an old fold-tale of the YEMMENITE JEWS.

In the winter of 1947-1948, the death penalty was imposed on Greek Workers striking for higher wages. This poem is dedicated to them.

The dead were buried.
Memory alone
clung to the precipice of tears.

The greatest guns had ceased.
Only in the distant corners of the earth
did life hang upon the verdict of the gun,

the trigger

and the bullet.

****

In the silent lands
the strong men with the strong hands
made the land to blaze with harvest

Made the wheels to spin
the fires to burn,
steel and stone to sing.

Stuffed men with vegetative hands
thought with paper bills
to pay the song of work.

With paper bills that bought back
not on-half,

One third,

One tenth,

The last night, the last dream was not different
from the last night, the last dream before attack.

The last night, the last dream was not different
from fevered childhood nights racked by
phantoms built of fear.

Not different from the sum
of all the hopeful,
hopeless hours writhed away between
the darkness and the light,
between today and tomorrow,
between perhaps and maybe,
yes and no.

Not different.
Not the same.
No space between the going and the coming
of the sun ever was so short.

No time . . . No time . . .
No time to review the years and the faces,
No time . . . to pierce the expectant abyss,
No time . . . to tremble at the trap-door to eternity.

Suddenly, the noose around his neck was real,
an all-emcompassing reality.

The world had collapsed into the circlet
of the rope

Fingers moved over his body.
The final search.
Nothing.
Not a penny or a pin or a particle of bread.
Nothing —

But a small silver seed.

the song of the strong hands made.

From empty pockets sprung the clenched fists.
Stopped the blazing harvest,
the spinning wheels
the singing world —

* * * *

A man among the rest arose to speak:

I am a childling of hunger.
Shall I stop my mouth with fear?
Fear was my nursemaid,
death was my companion.
Shall I stop my mouth with fear?
Shall I fling my body on the bullets?
Shall I sell my hands for
worthless paper bills?

Red spat
the answer of the coughing steel triggers

Ripped the fierce backs turned,
the hands held high
against the greedy guns.

Quickly to the blinded,
scaleless justice
take the worded one, quickly state the verdict.

A little man draped in black
(mock mourning for the sightless, scaleless lady)
addressed the court:

Death by hanging.

Time is of the essence. Do not waste it.
Time is money. Do not waste it.
Tomorrow in the morning is not too soon.
There are many to be hanged.

A child came
in the early morning to the gallows tree.
Fulfillment of a strange last wish.

To the child the last words
from the dry mouth and the tight lips:

****

Child...
I give to you this silver seed...
Maybe you will plant it...if you become an honest man.

It is the seed...of the Tree of Life,
and may be planted only by an honest man...
and in an honest land, else it will not grow...

An honest man is one...who does not take what is not his...
not food, nor other men's lives, nor other men's labor...
nor other men's minds, nor anything which other men have of their own creation or right...
An honest land is a brotherhood of peoples...
A singing land of work;
no idle hands, no hungry mouths,
for each a great and glorious task.

Gone the guns, long forgot the face of war
and greed and mercenary minds...
An honest land is a brotherhood of peoples...

These are the signs...

The hangman was impatient. Time is money.
He tightened the noose, gave the signal.
The trap door flew open.

The speech was finished.

The child walked slowly from the scene.
The silver seed sparkled and shone in the sunlight.

I will be an honest man
and make an honest land to plant my seed.

and he laughed, the sparkling promise clenched tight in his hand.

And he laughed again. It was good to laugh.
It was good.

— *Vera Steckler*

CARPENTER

Christ was a carpenter
An I too was one though black
And forced to work for less
Money and praise
Than the White journeymen
Still I built strongly
Whatever I built
And I am lying here
Happy awaiting the end
Of time and the happy
And sorrowful day of the beginning
Of forever
For I shall not care if
Schmidt the German carpenter's
Houses rot before
The chicken coops built
By these black hands.

—*Finley Nix*

IT IS SO PLAIN

Death! Why? No Death!
Life! What? Long Life!
A promise fulfilled by one; given to those
who labored a short time on earth.
Reward – profit – gain –
So far ahead of us let behind to suffer.

Meeting our loved ones seem time
forever.

No!
The spanning of life is so short
when measured by the yardstick,
eternity –
It's only a day – a day;
its's only a day.

—— *Rose Davis Greene*

LISBON

What I relate in this poem is of a large city
that fell to pieces,
Something very much as now in some places,
So much so that I could tell if I knew them,
Its every horror with a frigid eye
And with as much despair
As wouldn't wear well in heaven.

It is All Saints' Day then, a reverential
day in Portugal.
Men under holy rafters sing,
'Catching the conscience of the King.'

There is a stream of light on the plain.
Pious murmurs in the meadows.
Hymns and gardens. Over all God's pardon.
His mercies upon thousands fall.

Such atmosphere! Such ascending and descending
Of choirs and chants, of anthems soaring,
Soaring about cathedrals and cathedrals
Hovering in skies, and skies pouring
their effluence upon Ecclesiastics
In flowing frocks with candles mystic.
Aisles through various streets of varied
styles.

And across tables in houses, altars in shrines
and shrines in churches, falls
The Symbol of Symbol's shadow.
The book of Love and Hate and the Above,
And Wrath and Faith upon many a board
lies open
And much of the Word is spoken.

Ten thousand !! x/ .!' 'go scrEa

EameaEamEaeEam I ng i nn nnnn

n n n n n

nnnn nnn g!

!! (

)

(LIS/ BON

LIS/ BON

/the fourth in wrath the tall 1
flames S s staggers s s S s upon
crashes) th'/'xo .x/" " " " " " " " " " !
straight up(upon massed low
as in pictures by Picasso
utterly dismal Great God! etc.
Oh for Christ's sake! Good God!
Good Lord! Miserâcordia! !
Gre At h' shock f all s udden
one e very huge to WerE dged
C On vents an K ill'd
multituDes per at En
trance of horror up OnE ach
o theRu sh

m Oth her 's on s
thousands into street Oh
miseracordia! th E arth 's at
Wnd uP it s eem 'd eep
Crucifixes upon hearts
too horrific for Tears blast

again St one building S anK ill
ing a mass yet sp lit even

there is the lean of a stark sky
and huge
that thousand into
rushing
thrusts
crushes
with boats the sea is trewn
with multitudes the shore

the mul llllllll llll llll t
i tudes sssS s SSSS
s s sssS S s s
s ssss S
the guts of
men
in ruts
lie up
and bells knell
blood and
Cathedrals
/B/mot
s

—— *Russell Atkins*

BOOKS

Charles Waddell Chesnutt: pioneer of the color line. (324 p.) – Helen M. Chesnutt – University of North Carolina Press, 1952 ($5.00)

A book has been published recently which should be of great interest to people of color in particular, and literary people in general. The appearance of the biography of a Negro litterateur is always welcome, for there is a great scarcity of documentary evidence of Negroes who have passed this way. Charles W. Chesnutt was a Negro author and a resident of Cleveland, Ohio for many years. Chesnutt was a great pioneer in the field of letters, and paved the way for the many fine Negroes who write today. The book is authored by Chesnutt's daughter – lending authenticity.

Chesnutt's literary career, as revealed in his letters with editors and publishers, is a lively and pleasant narrative of author-publisher relations, with many interesting side lights on such notables of the turn-of-the century as Walter Hines Page, George W. Cable, William Dean Howells and others.

The background of Chesnutt's varied career as author is the unusual story of a man who under the heaviest handicap in American life, raised himself from poverty and obscurity – first as a self-taught teacher and stenographer in North Carolina and then as lawyer, writer, public-spirited citizen of Cleveland – to a national reputation as an author who caught the imagination and praise of the keen-sighted critic William Dean Howells who said:

> *Our own more universal interest in him (Chesnutt) arises from the more than promise he has given in a department of literature where Americans hold the foremost place. In this there is happily no color line; and if he has it in him to go forward on the way he has traced for himself... one of the places at the top is open to him.*

This book is highly interesting, and while letters usually bog down a biography, the skill and deftness with which the author has chosen them add materially to the enjoyment of this well-constructed book. Chesnutt's letters reveal the sparkling, effervescent, high-tension life of his family, keenly aware of the many racial discriminations but meeting it with the courage and good sense taught by a spirited and indomitable father.

The author reveals a pleasant, comfortable and rare picture of Cleveland life of the Mauve Period – a picture of a refined, cultured, gracious type of living. A very pleasant and interesting view is presented; and in less skillful hands it might seem superficial, but the treatment is simple, human and warm.

Public note did not turn Chesnutt from helping his race. Long before the emergence of the NAACP, and to the end of his life he lectured, wrote and corresponded on the "everlasting problem." In 1928 he was awarded the Spingarn Medal for his "pioneer work as a literary artist." Some great deal of space is devoted to Chesnutt's relations with Booker T. Washington, and where they differed.

The University of North Carolina Press honors itself by honoring a son of the great North State – this true pioneer of the color line.

— *Casper Le Roy Jordan*

CONTRIBUTORS

Helen J. Collins, librarian, Cleveland Public Library; poem in this issue winner of a prize, summer, 1952.

Mary B. Langrabe, librarian, Cleveland Public Library.

B. Helen Dobbins Dobbs, social worker, appeared in numerous anthologies.

Madison Wood, winner of *Scholastic* magazine award.

Erma D. McLemore, librarian, West Virginia State College, appeared in several anthologies.

Jaf'ar A. Shahid, Moslem student, first appearance.

Harvey LeRoy Allen, charter member of Free Lance Poets and Prose Workshop, died winter 1952.

Vera Steckler, library aide, Cleveland Public Library.

Finley Nix, law student, Cleveland John Marshall Law School.

Rose Davis Greene, composer, pianist and choreographer.

Russell Atkins, appeared in *Experiment, View, Poetry of the Negro;* composer, pianist.

Casper LeRoy Jordan, chief librarian, Wilberforce University.